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THE SS AND GERMAN  
RESISTANCE

FROM THE ORDER OF THE DEATH'S HEAD

Heinz Hoehne Coward-Mc Cann, 1970  
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IN autumn 1942 information reaching the RSHA caused SS-Gruppenführer Müller, the Head of the Gestapo, to prick up his ears. The Gestapo Leitstelle Munich reported a currency case which, though it seemed at first sight an ordinary misdemeanour, was to have considerable effects upon the whole structure of power in the Third Reich.

On orders from the Customs Investigation Office in Prague, a man named David had been arrested on the old Czechoslovak frontier for carrying 400 dollars without authorisation. David stated that he was acting on behalf of an Officer of Military Intelligence [Abwehr] under Admiral Wilhelm Canaris and that he had been commissioned to wind up certain financial dealings with Jews in the Protectorate.<sup>1</sup> From David the trail led to two sources of money, both in the pay of the Abwehr Office Munich—Captain Ickert and his friend Wilhelm Schmidhuber, a German exporter. Both were placed on the suspect list for breaking currency regulations.<sup>2</sup>

Under pressure Schmidhuber dictated to the Gestapo interrogating officials a statement which showed that this apparent currency offence had political implications. He referred to similar transactions undertaken by Dr Hans von Dohnanyi, a State Attorney working in the Abwehr Central Office under Major-General Hans Oster. Thinking that they had stumbled upon a further Abwehr affair, the Gestapo investigated further. They discovered that von Dohnanyi had provided Jews with papers and money from the Abwehr and allowed them to travel to Switzerland as agents.<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile Schmidhuber had been arrested by the Gestapo and "persuaded" to talk further. He indicated that there was some connection between his activities and the efforts made by Lieutenant Josef Müller of the Munich Abwehr to persuade the Vatican to mediate

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between Germany and the Allies.<sup>5</sup> Gestapo Müller immediately realised the implications of the Munich report; for the first time the Gestapo had succeeded in penetrating the mighty Abwehr which had so far prevented Müller's organisation from becoming Germany's sole secret service and protected the Wehrmacht from the prying eyes of the Gestapo. Moreover in the Gestapo's mind, Major-General Oster, Lieutenant Müller and Dr von Dohnanyi were suspect; they had long been convinced that the OKW Ausland/Abwehr office contained a group of determined enemies of the regime who under Wehrmacht cover—and therefore out of the Gestapo's reach—were planning the downfall of the National-Socialist regime.

Ever since the RSHA had clamped its controls on Germany, it had been at daggers drawn with the Abwehr. Although officially the two organisations collaborated, Abwehr officers were always criticising the unscrupulous Gestapo methods of suppressing so-called enemies and they thwarted all attempts by SS Headquarters to amalgamate the political and military secret services (SD and Abwehr) under the RSHA. The RSHA had already compiled what Heydrich called the "ammunition pack" which the Gestapo brains trust would open when the time seemed ripe to give the enemy the *coup de grâce*.<sup>6</sup> The "pack" contained secret dossiers recording numerous indications of anti-regime activity by Oster, Dohnanyi and Müller. Oster was a monarchist and a sort of Chief of Staff of the Abwehr; he had organised an internal political information service which provided the leaders of German resistance with reports of anti-regime sentiment; it was so effective that von Hentig, a foreign service officer, had referred in somewhat highly-coloured terms to "supervision of the entire Party by the Wehrmacht's Abwehr."<sup>7</sup> Dr von Dohnanyi, a lawyer, had been on the RSHA's black list ever since 1938, when he had helped to uncover the Gestapo intrigue against Colonel-General von Fritsch; he was also known to be in close contact with the anti-Hitler circle led by Ludwig Beck, the late Army Chief of Staff, and Carl Goerdeler, the ex-Burgomaster.<sup>8</sup> Lieutenant Josef Müller was a Catholic, later a co-founder of the Christian Socialist Union; he had long been under Gestapo and SD observation on suspicion of having divulged to the Belgian Legation in the Vatican the date of the German offensive in the West (10 May 1940).<sup>9</sup>

All this led Gestapo Müller to think that the Munich currency case offered an opportunity to disgrace the Abwehr. But nothing must reveal his true political motives; the Gestapo must give the

impression that the regulations... inside the Abwehr... but at the same time... by appointing... Reich Müller... at as investigating... Roeder, who... Nazi... ring.<sup>11</sup>

On 5 April... to... explained... Court... were in... weakness... few... in... the Abwehr... was... extracted... on... in... with... observation... desk... "These papers... and... pointing... at... the... K... a... Alfred... prison... because... more... Dohnanyi... to... impression...

impression that it was simply enquiring into a breach of currency regulations. Since the Gestapo could not pursue its investigations inside the Abwehr, Müller handed the case over to the Wehrmacht but at the same time ensured that the Gestapo had a hand in the game by appointing an observer, Kriminalkommissar Sonderegger.<sup>10</sup> The Reich Military Court, oblivious of the Gestapo's manoeuvre, nominated as investigating officer the senior Judge Advocate, Dr Manfred Roeder, who had already shown his ability as an investigator of anti-Nazi resistance in the case of the Soviet "Rote Kapelle" espionage ring.<sup>11</sup>

On 5 April 1943 Roeder and Sonderegger presented themselves to Canaris. Roeder produced an arrest warrant for Dohnanyi and explained to the Admiral that he was authorised by the Reich Military Court to search Dohnanyi's office.<sup>12</sup> A few minutes later the three men were in Dohnanyi's room. Roeder's unexpected visit exposed a fatal weakness to which the anti-Hitler conspirators were prone. Only a few days earlier Arthur Nebe, the Head of the Kripo, who had been in contact with the internal German resistance for years, had warned the Abwehr that Gestapo Müller was planning a coup, but Dohnanyi was still taken by surprise. Roeder went to Dohnanyi's desk and extracted a disorderly pile of documents. Among them was a file on Dohnanyi's Jewish agents in Switzerland and notes on peace talks in Rome and Stockholm undertaken by Abwehr officers together with Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was already under Gestapo observation.<sup>13</sup> Sonderegger noticed that Oster was staring at Dohnanyi's desk as if transfixed. A file lay upon it. Dohnanyi hissed to Oster "Those papers; those papers." Slowly Oster drew nearer to the desk and reached out to snatch the papers.<sup>14</sup> "Stop," Sonderegger shouted, pointing to Oster. Roeder turned round and grasped the position at once. He requested Admiral Canaris to order Oster to relinquish the papers and after some initial hesitation Oster complied.<sup>15</sup>

Roeder read the paper. On it Dohnanyi and Oster had worked out a code by which a meeting between Bonhoeffer and certain pro-Allied politicians, planned to take place in a foreign country, could be presented as perfectly harmless. This scene in Dohnanyi's room heralded the end of the Abwehr's independence. Oster, the opposition's most important informant next to Nebe, was dismissed and cashiered; Dohnanyi, Josef Müller and Bonhoeffer were arrested.<sup>16</sup>

In January 1944 the Gestapo brought off another coup against the imprudent Abwehr conspirators. Gestapo Müller broke up a resistance

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